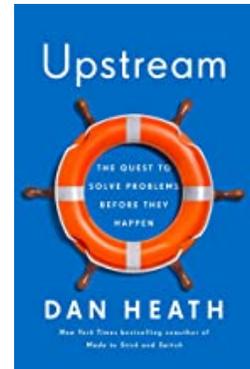




Read2Lead Module

Upstream: The Quest to Solve Problems Before They Happen

by Dan Heath



Book Summary from Google Books: “So often in life, we get stuck in a cycle of response. We put out fires. We deal with emergencies. We stay downstream, handling one problem after another, but we never make our way upstream to fix the systems that caused the problems. Cops chase robbers, doctors treat patients with chronic illnesses, and call-center reps address customer complaints. But many crimes, chronic illnesses, and customer complaints are preventable. So why do our efforts skew so heavily toward reaction rather than prevention?”

Upstream probes the psychological forces that push us downstream—including “problem blindness,” which can leave us oblivious to serious problems in our midst. And Heath introduces us to the thinkers who have overcome these obstacles and scored massive victories by switching to an upstream mindset. One online travel website prevented twenty million customer service calls every year by making some simple tweaks to its booking system. A major urban school district cut its dropout rate in half after it figured out that it could predict which students would drop out—as early as the ninth grade. A European nation almost eliminated teenage alcohol and drug abuse by deliberately changing the nation’s culture. And one EMS system accelerated the emergency-response time of its ambulances by using data to predict where 911 calls would emerge—and forward-deploying its ambulances to stand by in those areas.

Upstream delivers practical solutions for preventing problems rather than reacting to them. How many problems in our lives and in society are we tolerating simply because we’ve forgotten that we can fix them?”

What is Read2Lead?

Read2Lead is a series of book studies published by the Center for Junior Officers, a small Army research center dedicated to empowering junior officers to develop themselves and their teams. Read2Lead modules give junior officers a ready-to-use product that they can integrate into leader professional development programs.

What's in this module?

Every Read2Lead module contains:

- A short summary of the book that you can circulate to prime people for reading
- Advice for running your Read2Lead session
- A series of questions that can be used in multiple sessions, with options for using the questions over different lengths of time
- Additional resources that may be helpful for the facilitator

What do I need to provide to run a Read2Lead program?

First, the time. Read2Lead sessions work best when they're done over multiple sessions, so participants can digest books in small "chunks" instead of trying to cram them in all at once. Make sure you give your participants enough time to read the book and not fake the funk.

Second, the books. Books can be purchased with a government purchase card if they remain in the hands of the unit. Buying books for a Read2Lead session can be a great kickstarter for a battalion or even brigade library. You can also provide the books to Soldiers with the expectation that they pass them along to another Soldier when they are done with them. If you choose this approach, you should ensure you mark the books appropriately per the purchasing regulations and legal guidance of your organization.

Third, the space. Read2Lead sessions should be conducted in spaces where everyone can hear and see one another. Be creative: maybe you do them as hip-pocket training on a range, or at the end of motor stables. Or as a brownbag lunch in a barracks dayroom.

When you run the actual session, think of it as a time for your Soldiers to think outside the box, discuss something beyond the day-to-day concerns of the unit, and improve their communication skills. The questions provided on the subsequent pages are a starting point, but feel free to add or substitute your own to make the session more meaningful for your Soldiers.

Upstream 8 Week Program Questions

8 weeks is the optimal timing for this book. It minimizes the number of pages Soldiers must read every week and breaks the book into meaningful chunks.

Week 1: Chapter 1 (20 pages)

- “When you spend years responding to problems, you can sometimes overlook the fact that you could be preventing them” (Page 2). What problems are you or your organization facing? What upstream solutions should/are you or your organization pursuing to solve one or more of these challenges?
- What incentives (tangible or what it incentivizes on things like evaluations) does your organization offer? Which favor downstream (reactive) actions and which favor upstream actions? What adjustments do you think your organization could make in how it incentivizes actions?
- A theme in this chapter is the “invisible hero” ... the people who prevent problems and are not recognized the same way as those who “save the day.” What examples of invisible heroes can you think of in your life or your organization?

Week 2: Chapter 2 (17 pages)

- Problem blindness is the belief that negative outcomes are natural or inevitable. A phrase that can signal problem blindness is “that’s just how it is.” Where do/have you seen problem blindness occur when looking at problems? What could you do/have done to address them?
- “Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets,” said Paul Batalden (Page 26). What is your organizational or your personal system designed to get?

Week 3: Chapter 3 (17 pages)

- A lack of ownership means that the parties who can address a problem are saying, “that’s not mine to fix.” Where do/have you seen a lack of ownership occur when dealing with problems? What could you do/have done to address it?
- The book suggests we ask ourselves: “What if you told the story of your problems as if you were the only one responsible?” How would that change what you do?

Week 4: Chapter 4 (17 pages)

- When we are so normalized to reacting to problems, we never get around to fixing them. Where do/have you seen tunneling occur when dealing with problems? What could you do/have done to address it?
- “The need for heroism is usually evidence of systems failure” (Page 63). Where have you seen “heroism” when solving problems? How could those actions have been made unnecessary by upstream action?

Week 5: *Chapters 5-7 (59 pages)*

- Think about a problem you are facing right now, personally or professionally. How do these questions apply in your situation? What changes could you consider in light of what you've learned in these chapters?
- The book discussed the problem that silos within organizations can create. Where have you seen silos exist in your organization or a previous organization? What could you do to prevent the negative impacts or mitigate them?
- "Upstream change often means fumbling our way forward, figuring out what works and what doesn't, and under what conditions. But in the context, even the defeat is effectively a victory. Because every time we learn something, we fill in one more piece of the map as we hunt for the levers that can move the world" (Page 133). How well do you/your organization embrace failure? How does this impact the organization overall? Do you think the Army encourages people to fail?

Week 6: *Chapters 8-9 (35 pages)*

- How do we balance false positive (i.e. smoke alarm goes off when there is no fire) and false negative (i.e. smoke alarm does not go off when there is a fire) warnings?
- Think of a problem you/your organization is facing. How can you measure success of an upstream effort for that problem?

Week 7: *Chapters 10-11 (35 pages)*

- The cobra effect occurs when an attempted solution to a problem makes the problem worse (Page 177). How do you ensure this does not happen? Do you have any examples from your own experiences that highlight this effect?
- The military tends now to have the same budgeting system as corporate America. However, how do you see the last question (who will pay for what does not happen?) impacting military leadership at your level?

Week 8: *Chapters 12-13 (37 pages)*

- What is your take on the Y2K issue? Was it a crisis avoided or all hype? Are there parallels in your organization?
- What is one way you will apply the ideas in this book to a personal or work problem in your life?

Additional Resources:

- upstreambook.com: The author's website contains many additional resources for this and other books.
- Are you solving the right problems?: Author Thomas Wedell-Wedellsborg is known for his work in problem solving. You may find his HBR article, [Are you solving the right problems?](#), a great summary. He also wrote a book, [What's Your Problem?](#) and has a companion website called [How To Reframe](#).

Upstream 4 Week Program Questions

If you are pressed for time, here is a more condensed version.

Week 1: Chapter 1 (20 pages)

- “When you spend years responding to problems, you can sometimes overlook the fact that you could be preventing them” (Page 2). What problems are you or your organization facing? What upstream solutions should/are you or your organization pursuing to solve one or more of these challenges?
- What incentives (tangible or what it incentivizes on things like evaluations) does your organization offer? Which favor downstream (reactive) actions and which favor upstream actions? What adjustments do you think your organization could make in how it incentivizes actions?
- A theme in this chapter is the “invisible hero” ... the people who prevent problems and are not recognized the same way as those who “save the day.” What examples of invisible heroes can you think of in your life or your organization?

Week 2: Chapter 2-4 (51 pages)

- The three barriers to upstream thinking are problem blindness (I don’t see the problem), a lack of ownership (the problem is not mine to fix), and tunneling (I can’t deal with that right now). Think about a problem you or your organization are facing. Which barriers are present? What could you do to address them?
- “Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets,” said Paul Batalden (Page 26). What is your organizational or your personal system designed to get?
- The book suggests we ask ourselves: What if you told the story of your problems as if you were the only one responsible? How would that change what you do?

Week 3: Chapters 5-9 (94 pages)

- Think about a problem you are facing right now, personally or professionally. How do these questions apply in your situation? What changes could you consider in light of what you’ve learned in these chapters?
- The book discussed the problem that silos within organizations can create. Where have you seen silos exist in your organization or a previous organization? What could you do to prevent the negative impacts or mitigate them?
- “Upstream change often means fumbling our way forward, figuring out what works and what doesn’t, and under what conditions. But in the context, even the defeat is effectively a victory. Because every time we learn something, we fill in one more piece of the map as we hunt for the levers that can move the world” (Page 133). How well do you/your organization embrace failure? How does this impact the organization overall? Do you think the Army encourages people to fail?

Week 4: Chapters 10-13 (72 pages)

- The cobra effect occurs when an attempted solution to a problem makes the problem worse (Page 177). How do you ensure this does not happen? Do you have any examples from your own experiences that highlight this effect?
- What is your take on the Y2K issue? Was it a crisis avoided or all hype? Are there parallels in your organization?
- What is one way you will apply the ideas in this book to a personal or work problem in your life?

Additional Resources:

- upstreambook.com: The author's website contains many additional resources for this and other books.
- Are you solving the right problems?: Author Thomas Wedell-Wedellsborg is known for his work in problem solving. You may find his HBR article, [Are you solving the right problems?](#), a great summary. He also wrote a book, [What's Your Problem?](#) and has a companion website called [How To Reframe](#).